

Couple Things Here

1900 words

ted.gross@comcast.net

I needed to pay a guy back ten thousand dollars. Guy I met in the hot tub when I had to lay low in Arizona for a while, guy named McBride.

My tennis-partner-lawyer had suggested I disappear. Even though some of his own stories convinced me he's as crooked as the next guy. But he's not stupid, he did consult for the defense on the OJ Simpson case, so you didn't ignore him.

It was a false alarm, much ado about nothing, but I got a couple months in Eclipse, Arizona, out of the deal which wasn't the worst thing. Nice condo complex, multiple swimming pools, pickleball courts up the wazoo.

My favorite thing was getting a little exercise in the morning before it got hot and then easing into the spa. Where I met an assortment of people.

The first guy I met was a retired NFL player. Okay individual in the beginning, sense of humor, and then it turned ugly. Luckily he redirected his aggression toward

McBride, a big guy himself, who stood up to the NFL idiot, mostly. So I admired McBride.

There was an older woman in the complex I became friendly with. She had a rough story herself--her dad robbed a bank in Oklahoma when she was 8 years old and a few years after that he died in prison. She missed him her whole life, she thought he died of sadness.

This was Lucy. To make it worse, some wise guy started hounding her on Facebook, asking for a settlement. That was the other thing, an off-duty security guard unfortunately had perished in the robbery.

This jerkell claimed he was the security guard's grandson, and proposed a settlement amount.

This happened when I was out there, and Lucy was all shook up so I took a look. After putting a few ages and dates and places together it was clear it was a scam, this wasn't the grandson or any family member.

To head the guy off I needed \$10K cash, and McBride came through no questions asked. He was busy with a female when I knocked on his door, said hold on a sec and handed me the cash like I was borrowing a cup of sugar, and got back to business.

I ended up not requiring the money, I met the fake guy in Tonopah, Nevada, and took care of it a different way, but I hadn't been back to Arizona since. This is like 6 months ago.

Back to the present . . . the day starts off wrong and doesn't improve. I rented a car for the trip and on Highway 5 I get one of those 'low tire inflation' messages on the dashboard that you need like a hole in the head.

I go a little longer, hoping if I ignore it it'll go away, but the car starts pulling to the left so I stop, and yep, the thing is almost flat. Triple A takes an hour, and then the guy informs me the spare is bad too and he has to tow it.

By the time I get back on the road I'm too late for the mom and pop cafe I like in Barstow, and I'm in an extra bad mood, don't feel like checking in anywhere, so I load up on the coffee and drive straight through the night to Eclipse.

'Hey whaddaya know!' McBride says. 'Under which rock they find *you* at?'

I knocked on his door first, nothing doing, so big surprise he's in the hot tub. Admittedly it's that time of morning. I'm familiar with the lay-out, they have changing rooms, and I join him.

‘I got your thing is all,’ I say. ‘I added 5 hundred, little tip.’

‘Nah you don’t have to.’

‘Yes I do. You trusted me no questions asked. That’s a rare quality in a man.’

‘Okay cut the comedy. Let’s have dinner. How long y’here for?’

‘Well . . . hadn’t thought *any* time. Figured I’d complete the transaction and be on my way. Couple friends of mine moved to Prescott, might check it out.’

‘The fuck they move *there* for?’

‘Cmon dude. Y’alright? Seem more ornery than I’m placing you.’

‘Ah sorry to go off on you. I’m juggling these three women’s part of it.’

‘Oh. That’ll do it I guess.’

‘One of ‘em--you remember Karolina right? The gal pickleball pro?’

‘Might ring a bell, yeah,’ I say. Of course I remember Karolina, what’s this guy thinking?

‘She’s one. The other two . . . I don’t even want to get into it.’

Couple things here. Karolina got mixed up in that college admissions scandal, where she paid a shyster

clown in Tuscon to get her daughter into Duke. It didn't exactly work, he got her into Wake Forest. Worst part, the daughter didn't even like it, and left after a semester.

But Karolina was freaking out that law enforcement would catch up to her. So McBride and I went down to Tuscon, tried to reason with the guy, but ended up having to dangle him out a window and address his big toe with a power drill. This was to be sure Karolina's name was out of the picture if the guy got questioned.

You're never certain that kind of thing works, since you're dealing with the human condition. It did sound like at least so far so good, if she was still dishing out pickleball lessons and McBride was bedding her down like before.

When I say like before, that's the second thing. When I lived here there was some orgy activity going on among a segment of the pickleball participants. They'd retreat to someone's condo, sometimes McBride's, sometimes the ex-NFL idiot's, for drinks and a barbeque and then pair off.

It wasn't my cup of tea. I had a little something going with Pat, the condo sales and rental person. It ran its course, and Pat didn't refund me my security deposit

when I moved out. What can you do, maybe I deserved it.

I say to McBride I guess tonight's good, for dinner.

'Not tonight, I gotta work you in,' he says. 'Nothing personal. Stick around a while.'

So . . . you figure Prescott can wait, and when I finish the hot tub I drop by the rental office.

Pat's in there like before, she's moved her desk and seems to have a young assistant now, but other than that . . .

'You,' she says. 'We better go outside.'

'I won't lie to you,' I say. 'You got me tiptoeing around. No idea what to expect.'

'Let's not waste time. What do you need Pete?'

'You remembered my name. And used it. That's a start.'

'No.'

'I need a rental. Do you have like a week type deal?'

'No. Sorry.'

'Ah. Okay then . . . everything okay otherwise?'

'Not really,' she says.

So I'm not sure what I want to do, but I have to admit I'm intrigued by McBride juggling the three

women, and if the wild pickleball get-togethers are still going on, or if it's something different.

And again, not like I have to be anywhere, since I essentially *never* have to be anywhere.

So I find a motel, and spend as much time as possible back in the condo complex. It's low key, no one checks anything, so I swam, laid in the sun, worked out in the gym, fell asleep reading in the library they had, and even managed to play 9 holes of golf.

It took McBride a few days and we had dinner.

I tell him he looks worse than when I arrived. More drained.

'Yeah I gotta get out of here,' he says. 'Where would you go?'

'Well, I like casino towns. Probably that's just me.'

'I remember you saying that before. Why do you?'

'Everyone's passing through. Or running from something. Or looking for an old-fashioned fresh start. All that shit agrees with me.'

'You feel good that you have it more together than them,' he says.

'That's a damn good point. I'll keep it in mind . . . Juggling regular women, *your* deal, or still part of that group situation?'

‘Regular women. That other business all dried up when Waylon took off.’ Waylon was the ex-NFL guy.

‘I see. So just the normal--you can’t figure out which one you connect with best? And they’re all good waiting on your decision?’

McBride reminded me of the Marlboro Man. Not classically handsome but rugged and confident. A good protector.

‘Last time this happened,’ he says, ‘I was back in high school. Came time to invite someone to the prom. I wanted to up my odds so I invited three the same day.’

‘They all said yes is where you’re going. Then what?’

‘Yeah one of em’s dad complained to the school and I didn’t get to go.’

I thought about it. ‘Good to be in charge though.’

‘It always is. I got a test--against my judgment--my brother talked me into it--where they go in and check your asshole?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Couple issues in there.’

‘You’ll be okay. That’s why they do em.’

‘Could be. Got me thinking though about living life a little different. Going forward. You capiche?’

‘That why you’re juggling the multiple women? Just in case?’

‘You mean reinforcing that I’m still okay?’ He says maybe.

I wasn’t going to joke about living life a little different by cutting back on the carcinogens, from all the grilling McBride and everyone did around here on their little terraces even though it was about a hundred degrees at dinnertime.

I say, ‘Shouldn’t take a medical situation, to re-assess stuff.’

‘I hear you . . . If it, like amped up . . . and I elected to bring someone along for the ride . . . would I be out of bounds? In your view?’

Jesus what a question. Without even confirming where I think he’s going.

‘Yes,’ I say. ‘You’d be out of bounds.’

‘Good to hear . . . If I maneuvered it anyway-- despite no escalation--how would I handle it?’

‘You mean, like get away with it? Dog you’re concerning me now.’

‘I got a guy. A situation. Not around here, this is going back.’

‘Like I said.’

‘What can I say, asshole procedure brought him back to the forefront.’

‘Answer is you *don't* get away with it,’ I say.

‘Surveillance everywhere now. Phones. Worst is DNA.’

‘So you make sure you don't get surveilled, and don't leave any,’ he says.

‘Well guy I used to work with, he maintains accidents are still your best bet.’

‘Interesting. This fellow have any expertise?’

‘Not really. He fed me this in a bar.’

‘Can you ask him what type? I mean when it's convenient?’

‘Sure.’

‘Okay then, good. You want dessert?’

‘Trying to cut down on the sweets . . . I *am* a sucker for the cheesecake in this place.’

‘Me too. You'd think New York or LA, but they can surprise you here.’